

Shamokin, Pa.

This is the only time
they'll ever be alive:
consider how they spend it,
reflect upon the totality
of the act as he sits
beneath a tattoo needle,
she squirms to the smell
of six-packs and leather
in the back of a Chevy;
as he re-enlists for six
or else sells everything,
moves to Miami, can't stand
it there, moves back; she,
sixteen years old, decides
to be a nun, becomes one,
and after forty years
still is; as these two
stay married that long,
raise five kids, and split --

Appreciate the commitment
in one day giving in
to the rage and going mad;
or applying some peroxide,
or saying, "Please trust me,"
buying a house or pistol,
or following the fat smiler
along the narrow carpet
of some hotel ...

Look. A man turns forty,
gives up smoking, or starts.
Is a husband, a father,
a cuckold -- all three
or none of these -- is
a friend, veteran, boozier
or not: it doesn't matter.
Is a man, one who appears
to work with his hands
and who for some reason
has come this morning
to occupy that corner
by the tracks. He stands
there, touches his nose,
checks his watch, takes a
deep breath (he does not
smile), has a thought,
a feeling, or doesn't. He
waits. The clouds pass.
And it is the only time
he'll ever be alive.